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ABSTRACT

This study compared the attitudes of preservice physical educators after field experiences in adapted physical education and also compared attitudinal changes between those with such field experiences and those without. Subjects (n=63) all received 8 weeks of adapted physical education classroom instruction. One-third then experienced an 8-week supervised field experience at the local state school. Another third received 10 weeks of supervised field experience in an inclusive setting at a local primary school. At post-test the state school group showed significant changes in the direction of improved self-concept and inclusion of students with mild-moderate mental retardation. Significant attitude changes concerning motivation for nondisabled students were found for the inclusion group. These students also disclosed some significant negative attitudinal changes at post-test, especially toward inclusion of students with emotional/behavioral disorders. Results generally support the value of field experience in adapted physical education. (Contains 15 references.) (DB)

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Comparison of Pre-service Physical Educators' Attitudes Toward Individuals with Disabilities Before and After Adapted Physical Education Course Work

A Paper Presented at the National Conference of the Association of Teacher Educators, Orlando, FL (2000).

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An estimated 43 million individuals can be conservatively identified as disabled. Approximately 10 % of those are children (Sherrill, 1998). Due to federal mandates which require greater inclusion of children with disabilities whenever it is appropriate and to some degree, the reduced costs of educating children with disabilities in more mainstream settings, physical educators are likely to be required to teach children with disabilities (Rizzo, Broadhead, & Kowalski, 1997).

Successful teaching of all students is a dynamic process which requires specific knowledge and skill. However, knowledge and skill alone may not reflect the complete teacher. Children with disabilities extend the continuum of individual differences which teachers need to accommodate if they are to meet the demands and modern philosophy of education. One important aspect of successful teaching is one's attitude toward the individuals they are teaching (Rizzo & Kirkendall, 1995). Attitudes are related to how we

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feel about individuals and therefore have the potential to impact our actions (Sherrill, 1998; Tripp & Sherrill, 1991).

Negative attitudes have the potential to impact both individuals with disabilities and individuals without disabilities in adverse ways. Individuals with disabilities are affected when they are denied full participation in society (Patrick, 1987). Those without disabilities are adversely influenced because their opportunities for personal growth through diverse social interactions are reduced. Because a teacher's attitude can affect the way a child perceives her or himself and can also affect the way one child perceives another, teachers need to emote a positive attitude toward all of their students (Stewart, 1990).

Research indicates that both preservice and inservice physical education teachers may have negative attitudes toward children with various types of disabilities and factors beyond the child's control. Undergraduate professional preparation programs that prepare future physical education teachers should be committed to preparing teachers that have unbiased views of their students.

Pre K - 12 teachers are primarily dependent upon their undergraduate educational experiences to provide the foundation for their knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the time of their entry into the educational system. The importance of having a solid foundation lies in a combination of skills, knowledge, and psychological factors that make up a teacher. While teacher educators are confident that they can positively impact teaching skills and essential knowledge, less is known about the impact of pre-service teacher preparation on attitude.

Numerous studies have been conducted to garner greater knowledge about

variables which potentially impact the attitudes of preservice and inservice physical education teachers. Kowalski and Rizzo (1996), using the preservice version of the PEATID-III, identified perceived competence as the best predictor of favorable attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. They also correlated more favorable attitudes with more infusion-based course work and additional adapted physical education courses.

Using a unidimensional instrument, the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) scale, Patrick (1987) found significant positive changes in attitudes of students following the completion of an adapted physical education course which included practica with disabled individuals and a variety of other educational experiences. This study also examined the influence of administering a pretest attitude scale on students' attitudes and found a significant effect. In other words, administering a pretest about attitudes appeared to make students more aware of their attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.

In another study using the ATDP, Rowe and Stutts (1987), found no statistical differences between female and male students. The authors also reported a small percentage of students (11%) remained negative in their post test scores while 63 % became more positive and 26% remained positive throughout. The type of practica experience did not appear to impact student attitudes.

Another study using the ATDP and involving varying practica experiences was conducted by Stewart (1990). In this study, students had four choices for their practica experiences: Special Olympics for children, recreational swimming for children,

swimming for senior citizens with disabilities, and a fitness/recreation program for disabled university students. Attitude scores for those working with senior citizens declined while those for other groups improved. Scores for those in groups working with children and peers were significantly higher than those students working with the disabled senior citizens.

Again using the ATDP, Stewart (1991) found preservice students to have a significantly less positive attitude for individuals labeled "mentally disabled" when compared to attitude scores for those labeled "physically disabled" and those not labeled. In a 1992 study, Rizzo and Vispoel compared attitude changes for two groups of students enrolled in different courses, an adapted physical education course and a physical education for children course. Significant changes in attitude were reported for the adapted physical education students, but not for the physical education for children students, in spite of the fact that the physical education for children course did contain a unit on including children with disabilities in regular physical education classes. The greatest positive change in attitudes toward a specific disability occurred for Learning Disabled students. Students labeled behaviorally disordered were viewed least favorably of the three labeled disabilities, but still showed an improvement in the attitude score.

In a study which examined the relationships of several variables, Rizzo and Kirkendal (1995), the researchers found significant, but small correlations for age and behavioral disorders (r = -.18), experience and year in school (r = .19), experience and perceived competence (r = .36), and academic preparation and perceived competence (r

= -.21). Academic preparation and perceived competence were the best predictors of more positive attitudes.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to examine changes in attitudes of preservice physical educators after field experiences and second, to compare attitudinal changes between those with field experiences and those without.

Participants: Participants in the study were students enrolled in one of three undergraduate adapted physical education courses. The 63 subjects included 39 males and 24 females. The ages of the participants were grouped as follows: 6 were 21 years of age or younger; 41 were between 22-25; and 16 participants were 26 or older. Informed consent was contained and it was stressed that participation had no influence on course grades.

Method: The students were assigned to the following categories by class: Group 1 – State school group, Group 2- Inclusive group and Group 3- Classwork group. At the beginning of the semester all students were administered the PEATID-III (Preservice version) (Rizzo, 1993). This instrument consists of 12 attitudinal questions pertaining to inclusion in regular physical education of students with Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral Disorders, Specific Learning Disabilities, Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation, and Moderate-Severe Mental Retardation.

Interventions were conducted in the following manner:

Group 1- (State school group) Six weeks of Adapted Physical Education classroom preparation followed by an 8 week supervised field experience at the local state school. The population of the school consisted of individuals with severe, profound and multiple disabilities. The intervention involved client assessment by a two person team utilizing

the Data Based Gymnasium (Dunn & Morehouse, 1983). Two major skills were identified in the areas of basic game skills and leisure movement from the Data Based Gymnasium curriculum guide for the students to develop with clients. At the end of the 8 week period, state school personnel were given a report of progress by the university students. The PEATID-III was then readministered to participants at the end of the semester.

Group 2- (Inclusive group) Six weeks of Adapted Physical Education classroom preparation followed by 10 weeks supervised field experience at a local primary school (PK-1). Utilizing a local program (Building Bodies for Learning), students identified as delayed in motor skills were pulled aside and given remedial activities on a ratio of 1 preservice teacher to 2 students. At the end of the 10 week period, the PEATID-III was readministered.

Group 3- (control group) Consisted of an 8 week adapted physical education class preparation consisting of lecture and exercises without a field experience component. The PEATID-III was readministered at the end of the session. It should be noted that the lecture content did not significantly vary among the three groups.

Validity and reliability of the instrument. The construct validity of the PEATID- III was supported by factor analysis (Rizzo, 1988). Alpha coefficients were based on severe, profound and all PEATID-III items were .89, .91, and .94, respectively. Additional evidence of validity and reliability related to PEATID-III items can be found in Rizzo's (1985) study describing the original PEATH instrument.

Results:

During pretest no significant difference was found between the groups nor was any significant difference noted between male and female participants. Significance was found in the area of self concept at post-test for group 1 (state school group) when addressing populations with Emotional Disturbance/Behavior Disorders, Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation, or Specific Learning Disabilities. Significance for group 1 at post-test was also indicated for teacher attitude toward inclusion of students with Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation.

Significance in the area of motivation for nondisabled students was found at post-test for group 2 when dealing with populations with Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation and Specific Learning Disabilities. Conversely, significant negative attitudinal findings were also indicated for group 2. This group disclosed at post-test that students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders would not be accepted by nondisabled peers. Additionally, they opined that inclusion of students with Emotional Disturbance/Behavioral disorders placed an unfair burden on teachers. No significant differences were noted for group 3 between pre and post test.

Discussion:

While the ability to generalize the results is limited due to the difference in treatments, it would appear from the findings that working with populations with severe disabilities in a self contained environment facilitated a positive attitudinal change toward the effects of inclusion on self concepts of individuals with disabilities. This would support the findings of Patrick (1987). The lack of a significant difference between males and females is comparable to the results found by Rowe and Stutts (1987). It might also

be inferred from the findings that working with populations with severe disabilities produced an positive attitudinal change toward working with students with Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation. Field experience in an inclusive environment may produce a positive attitudinal change toward including students with Mild-Moderate Mental Retardation and Specific Learning Disabilities because it also motivates nondisabled students to learn and develop their motor skills. These findings concerning the positive effects of hands-on field experience correlate with those presented by Folsom-Meek, Nearing, Groteluschen and Krampf (1999).

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The findings indicate that field experience is an important part of the preservice training process. While the attitude changes vary between types of field experience and type of disability, the data indicates that courses including field experience have a greater impact on attitude towards inclusion of individuals with disabilities than do courses which are conducted strictly in the classroom environment.

However, it should be recognized that this study had several limitations. First, the study involved intact groups in the form of classes, and thus, is not a random sample. A second limitation is that the study did not account for student's prior experience with individuals with disabilities. This prior experience could skew attitudes in one direction or another. Finally, the difference in attitudes between group 1 & 2 might be attributed to the difference in ages of the clients. Inclusion literature cited indicates a more favorable attitude towards younger children with disabilities (Minner and Knutson, 1980; Rizzo, 1985).

Future research efforts in this area might include a larger sample size, a longitudinal study comparing attitudes from preservice through the first three years of inservice teaching. Finally, a revised instrument measuring the attitudes of classroom teachers, accounting for the limitations cited above, would greatly enhance the cooperative efforts of those advocating preservice field based education.

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